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Galaxy
Apr. 15, 1867.



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Galaxy
Apr. 15, 1867.

BERMUDA AND THE BLOCKADE.

PREVIOUS to the Southern Rebellion, Bermuda was comparatively unknown to the world, except as an important British naval station. No startling episode in the great concatenation of events had occurred for many years to disturb the tranquil repose of her many peaceful islands. Far out and alone in the broad Atlantic, like some beautiful recluse, she wooed the soft winds of Summer, or bared her breast to the Autumnal gales that wreathed her reefs and bald bluffs with foam. Monthly, the packet passing to and fro between St. Thomas and Halifax, and touching there, roused her from her Rip Van Winkle sleep; and when the few hours' bustle at the wharf had ceased, when the mail coach that ran from the hither point to the extremity of the islands had dispensed its favors along the circuitous route, and the little budget of news and epistolary missals had been duly digested, she lapsed again into the quiet of her daily routine. Her small farmers cultivated arrowroot, tomatoes, onions, and potatoes to a limited extent only (for her negroes had grown negligent and thriftless under the license of their freedom), an occasional craft dropped into her landlocked bays to bear her vegetable tributes to the markets of the North. And when the people of colder climes ate, in the early Spring-time, of her luscious bananas and those other luxuries so acceptable because so out of season, they thought kindly of Bermuda; and many an invalid went out to breathe the genial air of her Winter months. Tourists, too, have sketched the charms of her cedar-covered islets with their ever-changing outlines—and once the graceful pen of the romantic, and now lamented Willis essayed the pleasing task; but *his* eyes were dazed by the glare of her white limestone roads and snowy cottages and cliffs, and so he hastened home and never did full justice to Bermuda.

But suddenly a new era dawned upon the islands. A marvellous change came over the sleepy realm; the spell that bound the enchanted isle was broken. The war in America crowded her ports with shipping, and awakened the echoes of busy trade and commerce, which frightened the hobgoblins from the caves which they had tenanted since Shakespeare sang the tale of "vexed Bermoethes" two hundred years ago. The blockade of the Southern ports threw into her lap rare treasures, to which her eyes had been unaccustomed before, and often upon her deep, transparent waters, were seen what looked like clots of foam, but which were really stray waifs of cotton floating—cotton worth two shillings sterling per pound. Ah, what golden harvests were reaped, what mighty risks

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were run for this same cotton in those old blockading days! It seemed as though wealth came down in showers upon Bermuda. It blessed all in any way connected with the blockade. It blessed the adventurers of high and low degree, who gathered there from the four quarters of the globe to speculate upon the national misfortune; it blessed the grasping Englishman, the Southern renegade, the deserter from the North, and the mercenaries and sharpers of all colors and persuasions, alike. The employés of blockade-runners received fabulous wages—captains \$2,500 in gold per round trip, which never exceeded a month, and was sometimes made in a week; pilots \$1,500; engineers, coal-heavers, and seamen, in proportion. The capitalists who invested in the venture seldom failed to make fortunes, notwithstanding the large percentage of steamers lost or captured, for the gains were so immense that one successful voyage made up the loss of half a dozen failures. They fared sumptuously every day upon the profits which they sheared from the poverty and distress of those who bore the burden of the war. Their steamers were supplied with the luxuries of every clime. The cabin tables were spread with sparkling wines and choicest viands. The pinched Confederates, whom three lingering years of war had reduced to rags or homely homespun, looked with envious eyes upon the sleek, well-dressed blockade-runners who sauntered through their streets at will, while they themselves were in constant dread of provost-marshals and conscripting officers. They gloated upon the glittering gold the strangers lavished, and despised their own paper dollar, which would hardly buy a row of pins. The invalids who sweltered and thirsted in the hospitals were thankful for the boon of a little ice which they chanced to receive from some vessel's chest at Charleston or Wilmington. It seemed to the struggling South as if the steamers were the only link between their present world of despair and a realm of happiness beyond; and when, at intervals, they steamed swiftly up to its deserted ports, their advent was always welcomed with delight.

On such occasions there was some semblance in these ports of the commercial activity in the by-gone days of peace. Negroes bustled about the wharves, and the incessant clatter of the donkey engines was heard, discharging freight which long-tailed drays carted leisurely away. However, excepting these and the seamen, only a few old men and youngsters of various hues sauntered about the spot. The streets were quite deserted except by the provost guard, an occasional female in mourning garb, or a crippled soldier hobbling on his way. There was an oppressive sense of desolation everywhere, such as one feels in an old mill where the machinery, long since silenced, has gone to rust, with rank moss grown on the water-wheel, and the weather-worn roof opening to the sky. In the market, a brace of lean fowl and a half dozen slimy catfish patiently

waited a purchaser. An old scow ferried occasional passengers over the river to the dilapidated buildings opposite. (We are writing of Wilmington now.) All around the railroad depot broken machinery, old cannons and merchandise were strewn. Three or four used-up locomotives were in perpetual hospital at the round house, and a wheezy old engine, with steam escaping at every joint, had just struggled in with the "express train" of half a dozen leaky cars, at a maximum speed of five miles an hour. No smoke issued from the chimneys of the hamlet on the neighboring knoll, for its owner was long since killed in the war, and the females of the family had moved away. Lean cranes flapped lazily up from among the rank reeds and cat-tails that grew in the abandoned rice-fields. White people were out at their elbows and toes, and the negroes wore fragments of Federal uniforms, which had been stripped from battle-fields. Buzzards seldom vouchsafed their once familiar presence, for they had long since followed their scent to the richer banquets near Chancellorsville and Chattanooga. Cotton, which had been brought from its hiding places in the interior, lay piled in vast quantities in sheds and in the open air. In places it was strewn knee-deep, where the bagging had burst open, rotted by long exposure. Huge masses of rosin, melted and run together and mingled with hoops and staves, were encountered on every side. What wealth lay wasting here, while the world was suffering for the want of it!

Such was the picture, truthful as melancholy. At the steamers' offices, however, there was always some stir, and when an auction sale of blockade goods was advertised, something of a crowd was collected. All the Jews swarmed there from far and near, like flies around the bung of a sugar cask, wrangling with each other and scrambling for the prizes offered. (These worthies owed no allegiance, except to Moses, and consequently were exempt from military service.) Large prices were paid in Confederate scrip for coffee, medicines, shoes and the rest of the catalogue; and with the proceeds the blockade-runners purchased the coveted cotton at \$250 per bale. When the blockade business was at its climax, Confederate money was worth about \$14 for \$1 in gold, and as the cotton brought from 45 to 50 cents per pound in Bermuda, the profit on a single bale was \$230!

Sometimes as many as a dozen steamers were in the port of Wilmington at once. In general they loaded leisurely, because they had to wait their opportunity. It was only when the night was moonless and the tide full on the bar that they could hope to run the blockade with success. The "silvery moon" had no charms for blockade-runners; rather come storm and angry wrack of wind and waves. Occasionally three or four would run out together dividing the attention of the ever-vigilant blockading cruisers, but,

as a rule, each attempted the perilous gauntlet alone. Often they failed upon the very threshold of their adventure, and the anxious owners on shore received early intimation of their probable fate in the dull boom of guns that was wafted from Fort Fisher, thirty miles below. It was a bold act, worthy of brave men, to attempt that bristling cordon of Federal ships in an unarmed, inoffensive craft. Ladies often did it, too; but ladies can be brave even when men's courage quails.

✓ We can imagine one of these long and rakish steamers lying in the stream opposite the cotton-sheds where she has been loading—a jaunty craft with graceful lines, appointments all complete, and color so like the dusk, that at nightfall she seems but a doubtful shadow upon the water. The thin cloud of brown smoke that floats from her funnel, and the merry “heave-yo” at the windlass, betoken that she is getting under way. Her flags are flaunting gayly—a Confederate at the stem, a British at the stern. There is a group of ladies and children on her quarter-deck, and but for the long rows of cotton bales that peer over her rail, one might imagine that she was engaged for a pleasure excursion down the river, only that it is not customary for officers in uniform to demand passports of mere excursionists. Male passengers are scarce, for the gates of the Confederacy are closed to such. Beside a couple of Jews, there are an invalid and a cripple; also two nondescripts, whom the provost guard, the shippers, the negroes on shore, their fellow-passengers, and the examining officer, have repeatedly passed opinion upon as to whether they were deserters, Yankee spies, correspondents of the London “Times,” Government officials, or agents of the Government departing on secret service. However, they are both thoroughly “papered,” and no objection can be made. Their passports are from headquarters at Richmond, and duly viséd by the commanding officer at Wilmington.

There is very little vivacity on board. A feeling of uncertainty pervades all. Friends part with tremulous hand-shakings. Those who command the craft know well the dangers that attend the voyage, and the risk that hangs over their rich freight of half a million. Many a lady's bosom heaves with throbbing heart and breath suppressed even while gliding securely past the rice-fields, marshes and belts of timber that girt the river bank. Wilmington gradually fades from view. The sun settles down upon the red horizon. An iron-clad struggling up against the current is passed and left astern. The steamer picks her way through tortuous channels, successive obstructions of piles stretched across the river, and labyrinths of torpedoes, marked by flag-buoys. Down near the mouth of the river there is a battery, and from a cutter that has put out from shore a lieutenant with his guard clambers over the ship's side to search for stowaways and examine passports again. Every nook

and corner, every locker and pantry, is searched this time. Even the hold and coal-bunkers are fumigated, to smoke out any who perchance may have concealed themselves there. When these trials have been endured, the steamer increases speed and proceeds on her course to the broad and placid sound that is sheltered by the bar. There she rests at anchor and awaits the protecting shades of night. Here there is no danger. The bristling guns of Fort Fisher and the Mound Battery, and the shoal water on the bar, afford double protection. The blockading fleet lies miles away outside. Perhaps from the masthead the outlines of one or two of them can be indistinctly traced—nothing more.

As dusk falls, a little boat puts out from land. This brings the indispensable pilot, who at once becomes grand master of the ship. Everything depends upon his skill and implicit obedience to his directions. He has the path before him all mapped out, and can tell the number and latest position of every blockader off the adjacent coast. He has carefully noted the stage of water, marked the channel, set his signal lights, and arranged the indispensable preliminaries of the trip. At length the last glimmer of twilight has vanished. A perceptible haze gathers upon the ocean. Every light in the ship is carefully extinguished. The binnacle is enveloped with canvas. Telegraph lines are rigged fore and aft to communicate from the pilot forward to the officer who directs the helmsman at the wheel. The lookouts, the captain and subordinate officers take their respective places. Presently a deep sigh comes from the ponderous engine, and a tremor runs through the vessel as she gathers headway and snuffs the fresh breeze that comes from the ocean. Strictest silence is enjoined now. Not a whisper is heard. Even the splash of the patent paddle-wheels (never very noisy) is drowned by the monotonous sough of the breaking waves. The funnels emit no vapor or tell-tale sparks. The lights on shore change rapidly with the varying course. A red lantern flashes for an instant to starboard and then goes out, just where a glimpse was caught of a cloaked figure seated in a skiff. A pale, white light gleams on the larboard side. A brighter one blazes from Fort Fisher in the distance. And thus the course is laid over the bar. The speed of the vessel increases as the hour of trial approaches, and the lights afloat and ashore flit and intermingle with a rapidity that confuses the senses. Presently the swash and long swell of the sea denote that the bar is passed, and the lights, now grown faint and spectral, seem to keep pace with the vessel as she lays her course along the coast.

The novice sits aft with bated breath and his heart in his throat, a desperate grip upon some stanchion, and eyes straining far out into the gloom, while, with a sinking sensation like being twirled in a swing, he is hurried through space at a speed of twenty miles

an hour, over billows of liquid fire that roll off into the wake behind. The silence is oppressive, and the suspense painful. But presently a new object of interest absorbs attention. Can you see nothing? there—just where the gleam of that brilliant star flashed on the foam? Pshaw! 'tis mere fancy. The shadows always fall deepest where the dull gray of the ocean blends with the sky. It is the loom of the mist, nothing more. And yet there *is* something that flits like a shadow, moving as we move—an undefined nebula without shape or substance, ever attendant, like an incubus that oppresses one in dreams. Ha! this is exciting! What tension of taut-drawn nerves! What if it should be one of them! We are drawing a little ahead of the thing now. Surely it is a blockader, and one of the fleetest, too. Her scent is keen! Those lights on shore betray us whenever we run between them and her. If we could only head her off now and stand out to sea! But not yet! See! she burns a blue light, and how it streams over the waves! And there goes a rocket! We can see her plainly enough now—as plainly as she can us—and so near, just on our port bow! We are lost beyond hope; yet the ladies are calm and motionless, and the children are sleeping quietly below. Ha! there it comes—a shot. “Take care!” There is a dazzling glare like a flash of sheet lightning, a deafening roar from the guns, and all is gloom again. The blue light has burned out. “Any one hurt? Were we struck?” “No.” “All right; pitch in the resin, engineer, and shove ahead! Hard-a-starboard there at the helm!” There is no occasion for farther silence now. The swift craft doubles on her track like a swallow, and stands directly out to sea. In ten minutes she is safe. Still, the engines do not cease their effort, but all night long she leaves the coast at swiftest speed, outward bound for Bermuda. Vigilance is not relaxed. By day there are lookouts stationed aloft, and every craft like a steamer is carefully shunned; at night, again, lights out as before; and so, day after day, until at length the tall beacon on the islands flashes out its friendly blaze, the steamer runs in under the rocky shore, and the rattle of the cable over the bows tells that she is safely anchored in the roadstead.

In the early morning, with a negro pilot on board, the vessel steams tortuously through narrow channels among picturesque islands, some bald and wave-worn, and others crowned with snowy cottages nestling in groves of cedar, with weather-stained ruins and grim martello towers from which great cannon bristle, and rounding a point abruptly, comes at once in full view of the romantic port of St. George's, with its crowded shipping, its white and yellow limestone houses, its tropical trees with their great broad leaves, its many skiffs and row-boats passing to and fro, and the grand old hill behind with its signal-station and frowning battery. There the blockade-runner, with its precious freight, had no fear of Federal

cruisers, albeit their ports might yawn and cannon bristle within pistol range.

At only one other spot on the globe could be seen in those days the same commercial features that made Bermuda attractive to those interested in keeping open the outlet for cotton. As at Nassau, so here, the attention of the stranger entering the harbor was at once attracted to the sharp and graceful outlines of the numerous lead-colored steamers that lay at anchor in the stream or moored alongside the wharves; and among all the miscellaneous shipping, but two flags were conspicuous—the cross of St. George and the Rebel flag, the one with its crimson field and the other with its field of snowy white. The Stars and Stripes were not numerous, for fear of Rebel cruisers had induced the Federal vessels to seek the protecting ægis of the British flag. On shore, long lines of cotton bales lay piled upon the wharves; vessels bound to transatlantic ports were busily loading with the precious staple; gangs of stalwart blacks sweltered in the sun as they plied their cotton-hooks. Then, if ever, the negroes of Bermuda had fallen upon “flush times.” A crown was as easily earned as a shilling used to be. Boating seemed to be the favorite employment of both sexes. Fleets of skiffs and small craft of all descriptions thronged like bees around a newly-arrived ship. Negroes of every size and hue clung to her sides and clambered up the rigging, anxious to earn a sixpence by putting passengers ashore. Ebony Venuses in short frocks and palm-leaf hats with enormous brims vied with greasy and dilapidated Sambos for customers. Six boats insisted upon carrying the same passenger. There was always a ridiculous rivalry at the foot of the gangway-ladder, and an incessant bandying of epithets and threats. And when some official barge hauled in alongside with vigorous sweep of oars, there was a crash among the lighter skiffs, a clatter of oars and paddles, a jargon of angry voices, a dodging of woolly pates, and a rolling of whites of eyes that threatened disaster somewhere.

The passenger who was fortunate enough to run the gauntlet of this rivalry successfully, did not find St. George’s an attractive place; nor will he to-day. The hot sun streams up from the dazzling white of its narrow limestone streets and is reflected again from the walls on either side. Houses, neat and substantial enough, but without architectural plan, are inconveniently placed in the path just where one wishes to go. Streets, lanes and alleys intersect each other in labyrinthine perplexity. The banana and paw-paw grow in most improbable places, and dispute with the cottages for their sites. Descending the hilly roads, the foot slips into a gully, and going up, the toe encounters an inconvenient rock. Soldiers in red coats flash like flambeaus at every turn, and everywhere sailors, blockade-runners, citizens, merchants and lascivious

mulatto women, congregate like people at a fair. The plaza or open square is crowded with lazy negroes who have nothing to do; not far away, among the shipping, is a camp of black women, huddled like gipsies around their pots and fires, engaged in cooking for such as are hungry and not curious as to culinary secrets. Near at hand is the market wharf, crowded with fishing boats, whose sable proprietors skin huge fish with dexterous knives as easily as one draws off his glove. These will always give good weight for an extra price per pound. Trade is active in all the shops, and not one but has some interest in the blockade. The beer and gin shops drive a thriving business; the clothing shops coin money; and in the larger establishments huge piles of blockade goods fill every nook and cranny. Every one has his hands full of business. Ships cannot bring supplies fast enough. Shops are repeatedly emptied and replenished. The large hotels cannot begin to accommodate all who apply, even though the charges are exorbitant. Supplies of coals constantly arrive for the blockade-runners, and many a swift steamer that comes from England finds her most profitable venture in the direction of a Confederate port.

Such was the aspect of things in the once lethargic, staid old town of St. George's during the palmiest days of the blockade. Who will say that the social benefits derived equalled the pecuniary profits? What old resident did not shudder at the corruption that danced attendance upon a feverish trade.

As every project and every venture, in those days, looked toward the Southern coast, of course the inhabitants were intensely "secesh." More than one resident of the islands ran the blockade to fight the battles of the South. The songs of "Dixie," and the "Bonny Blue Flag," were everywhere heard. Even the negroes caught the infection, and sang how "Jeff. Davis is a gentleman, and Abe Lincoln is a fool." Confederate papers were received almost semi-weekly. Confederate flags were chalked upon the walls and gateways. Pictures of prominent Southerners, and of Rebel cruisers, adorned the photograph galleries. Almost every house had some memento of the Confederacy. British goods were always in great demand by the blockade runners, for they would have no dealings with Yankees. Accordingly, in the shops could be found bushels of Connecticut pins and cases of Massachusetts shoes marked "London," elegant felt hats from New York labelled "Paris," and good old Irish whiskey from New Jersey; for there were many articles that could be purchased cheaper in the United States than in Europe, and the laws of trade are inflexible—"the longest pole knocks down the most persimmons." And so quantities of these goods found place in blockade cargoes, to the great profit of shrewd speculators at the North.

In that period of promiscuous scrambling for wealth, it was a

relief to escape from this contaminating atmosphere of St. George's, to shake the dust from the feet, and fly at a spanking gait over the hard lime road toward Hamilton. It is the regular mail route, and a finer road is seldom seen. It is a luxury to drive over such a road. The breeze almost always blows fresh from the ocean and tempers the heat of the ardent sun. Elegant equipages are encountered at frequent intervals (for they have fine carriages in Bermuda). The wheels fly around with a low, pleasant clatter as they reel off the easy miles, and the horses step off over steep ascent and level way alike, with a gait that never flags.

Seldom is found more varied or picturesque scenery than among the islands of Bermuda. There are wooded dells as secluded as if far remote from sea, where mangroves grow and the aroma of the sage-bush perfumes the air. There are dark avenues of cedars, whose dense foliage shuts out the sun. Here, on a rising knoll, an aristocratic cottage peers out from among palmetto groves and clustering banana and paw-paw. Hedges of oleander in luxuriant bloom, grow high above the limestone walls that girt the road, and through the vista we catch a glimpse of the blue ocean beyond. Then an abrupt turn in the road leads to a narrow neck of land and reveals an unobstructed view. On the right is the broad expanse of ocean, with snowy sails penciled on the far horizon, and sparkling lines of foam that break over the coral reefs nearer shore; on the left, an archipelago of islets—some of them densely wooded—with outlines sweeping gracefully into all conceivable curves, while others are mere isolated hummocks of rocks where the surf never ceases to thunder. Now we cross a substantial bridge that joins two islands, and looking over the rail down into the deep green water, twelve feet or more, can see the large fish sporting on the bottom. Then there is a ferry to cross, and after that the road skirts the rocky shore so closely that one can toss a pebble into the emerald sea and hear the sough of the waves that moan and murmur in the selfsame caves that Calaban knew of long ago. Here are rocks chafed into every fantastic shape by the angry surges which in storms dash far over the roadway. At intervals, pieces of wreck are strewn—relics of fated ships lured to destruction by the siren voice of sweet Bermuda, so peaceful when the sea is calm.

At intervals great water-tanks are cut into the rocky hill-side to catch the rain; for the Bermudians have no wells, and must provide against times of drought. Approaching Hamilton, the road turns inland again, cut through the solid rock in many places, and winding over hill and dale, through shady groves of cedar; past elegant mansions, half hidden by foliage, and protected from intruders by massive walls, whose tops bristle with spikes or broken glass laid in cement; past little patches of arrowroot and sweet potatoes; then through avenues of palmetto and China trees, that

lead up to a pretty chapel and its churchyard; and at last to the coast again, where there are romantic little bays with houses perched upon the very shore, ornamental gardens shut in by sea walls, boat-houses, bathing-houses, and jaunty yachts at anchor.

All the buildings in Bermuda are built of limestone, for the whole island is but a quarry, and when a carpenter wishes to build, he takes his saw and saws himself a house from the material at hand. The people are aristocratic, but hospitable; the mansions elegant, the gardens spacious and beautiful; the shaded avenues and suburban retreats afford many delightful drives.

At Somerset are fine farms and grazing-fields for the cattle that are brought from New York and Nova Scotia for the Bermuda market. At Ireland Island are spacious storehouses for the garrison, an iron floating battery, several strong fortifications, and an extensive quarry. Here also are some of the finest docks in the world, all built by convict labor that extended through many years of toils (for Bermuda was a penal colony once), and here are the huge wooden hulks in which they were confined, still moored to the quay. Some men-of-war are always stationed here.

What more need be said in praise of Bermuda, or in descriptive detail? It is true that the flush times of the old blockading days have passed away. The golden gains they then enjoyed were as transitory as the so-called Southern Confederacy itself. The commercial fabric upon which many hopes were built has crumbled. The motley crowd of speculators and cormorants that thronged her streets is dispersed forever. Her wharves no longer swarm with shipping. Once more she has lapsed into the healthful quiet of her former peaceful life. The little colony lives and moves in blissful independence of the vexed questions that distract the world outside, unmoved by the turmoil of political strife. Her Governor regularly draws his ample salary, her legislators receive their stated pay for settling the momentous affairs of the island, and the citizens are happy in the possession of a sufficiency of the good things of this life. Invalids still seek the genial atmosphere of her Winter months, and hold their visits always in kindly remembrance. Happy is Bermuda, no longer vexed with the fever of excitement that was attendant on the blockade.

ALWAYS LOVE.

BECAUSE Love's sigh is but a sigh,
Doth it the less Love's heart disclose?
Because the rose must fade and die,
Is it the less the lovely rose?
Because black night must shroud the day,
Shall the brave sun no more be gay?

Because chill Autumn frights the birds,
Shall we distrust that Spring will come?
Because sweet words are only words,
Shall Love for evermore be dumb?
Because our bliss is fleeting bliss,
Shall we who love forbear to kiss?

Because those eyes of gentle mirth
Must sometime cease my heart to thrill,
Because the sweetest voice on earth
Sooner or later must be still,
Because its idol is unsure,
Shall my strong love the less endure?

Ah, no! let lovers breathe their sighs,
And roses bloom, and music sound,
And passion burn on lips and eyes,
And Pleasure's merry world go round:
Let golden sunshine flood the sky,
And let me love, or let me die!

WILLIAM WINTER.

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